



On the Politics of Singularity

Tekilliğin Siyaseti Üzerine

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Öz

Bu çalışmada, son yıllarda felsefe alanında yaygın olarak kullanılan "tekillik" kavramının siyasi uzamda sağladığı imkânlar üzerinde durulacaktır. Tekilliğin farklılığa, ilişkiselliğe ve değişime dayalı siyasi açılımları irdelenmeye çalışılacaktır. Bu açılımların çağdaş siyaset felsefesi bağlamında bir tartışması yapılarak, tekilliğin siyasetinin çözümleme arayışında olduğu sorunlar üzerinde durulacaktır. Bu siyasi mücadele yönteminin ne ölçüde bir süreklilik biçimi kurabildiği ya da kurucu öz-yönetim pratiklerini gerçekleştirmede ne derece etkili olabildiği hususunda birtakım fikirler ileri sürülecektir. Ayrıca, tekilliğin siyasetinin fiili kazanımlarından ve eksikliklerinden söz edilerek, bu siyasetin güçlü bir direniş formu oluşturabilmesinin imkânları tartışmaya açılacaktır. Böylelikle, tekilliğin siyasetinin güçsüz kaldığı düşünülen yönlerinin giderilebilmesi için kuramsal bir katkı sağlanılmasına çalışılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Tekillik, demokrasi, farklılık, temsiliyet, kimlik, toplumsal hareketler*

Abstract

In this article, we focus on the possibilities of the philosophical concept of "singularity" in political sphere. We explicate the dimensions of singularity which emphasise difference, relationality and change. By discussing these dimensions in the context of political philosophy, we stress the problems that a politics of singularity seeks to analyse. Some ideas would emerge on the sustainability of this political strategy and the effectiveness of it in realising founding self-government practices. Then, by discussing the acquisitions and imperfections of the politics of singularity, we try to reveal the possibilities for this political strategy to become a strong form of resistance. So, we hope to make a theoretical contribution to dispel the weak points of the politics of singularity.

Key words: *Singularity, democracy, difference, representation, identity, social movements.*

Introduction

Singularity as a concept is nowadays used widely in the social sciences. The meaning of singularity varies according to its context in various thinkers and traditions of philosophy. Such a multilateral usage leads to the creation of different ways of thinking and to the gradual proliferation of features attributed to singularity. In some ways, we can consider that as a positive thing; however it also complicates a potential simple explanation about the concept and its properties. It also makes it difficult to distinguish where these properties begin and end. However, when the concept of singularity is examined together with contemporary thinkers, that is, when this concept is discussed in the context of a particular philosophical tradition, the borders of singularity as a concept become clearer and some of its distinguishing features are observed more concretely. A discussion of this sort certainly begins with the question of "What is singularity?" and the answer given to that question helps to reveal both the borders of the concept and the perspective of the concept's user. For instance, two significant contemporary thinkers, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, argue as follows: "Singularity points toward and is defined by a multiplicity outside of itself. No singularity can exist or



be conceived on its own, but instead both its existence and definition necessarily derive from its relations with the other singularities that constitute society" (Hardt and Negri 2009: 338). In other words, multiplicity attributes meaning to singularities and singularities attribute meaning to multiplicity. From this perspective, singularity should be used neither simply as "being singular" nor should we attempt to explain it by juxtaposing it against the concept of multiplicity because the singular one already carries multiplicity in itself. The feature of singularity to be defined by a multiplicity outside itself is also mentioned by another important contemporary thinker, Jean-Luc Nancy. According to Nancy, "the singularity of each is indissociable from its being-with-many... The singular is primarily *each* one and therefore, also *with* and *among* all the others" (Nancy 2000: 32). One singularity, no matter what, joins with the many only because it exists. The critical point here to consider is that singularity identifies togetherness, being-with-many; in other words, the togetherness of singularity or its being with the many. This feature means that singularity never closes upon itself like a single point, but it rather opens itself out, constituting the relationality between inside and outside.

If we refer back to Hardt and Negri after having emphasised singularity's first feature as its "being with" or "relationality with" many other singularities, it will be seen that they clearly identify the other two features of singularity: "Every singularity points toward a multiplicity within itself. The innumerable divisions that cut throughout each singularity do not undermine but actually constitute its definition. Also, singularity is always engage in a process of becoming different—a temporal multiplicity" (Hardt and Negri 2009: 339). Because it is open to change or becoming, it affirms difference rather than similarity. In other words, ontologically singularity comes into being differently which makes it ontologically resistant (Negri 2013: 10). Therefore, singularity does not follow any rules of harmony or repetition, and it cannot be treated within the framework of any historical imperatives. These two features show us that singularity consists of "difference" and "becoming" within it; since, these features can also be traced back to Nancy who argues that the individuals constituting the relationship of existence are different from each other and create becoming-with within the existing thing (Nancy 2000: 28-40). According to Nancy, an individual not only presumes the difference between the subject of his representation or the subject of his hegemony and himself, but also presumes the difference between other individuals and himself. In this regard, Nancy states that the difference between two "me"s as well as existence is given:

There does not exist just these "me's," understood as subjects-of representation, because along with the real difference between two "me's" is given the difference between things in general, the difference between my body and many bodies (Nancy 2000: 29).

Nancy explains the singularity of singulars and therefore the differentiation of singularity from other singularities. Singularity is different from notion of the particular because it presumes the togetherness that the particular is a part of. Singularities are those togethernesses in singular condition that exist neither as a totality nor as a society.

In brief, according to what Hardt, Negri and Nancy argue, there are roughly three main features of singularity: "Relationality", "Difference" and "Becoming". In this study, it will be examined how these features reveal the creative process of singularity and how they define the political insight to be gained from the concept of singularity. It will be examined how the politics of singularity comes into being from the togetherness of singularities conserving their own freedoms and differences.

1. Beyond Identity and Politics of Representation

The three features mentioned above provide a framework to the discussion about the politics of singularity. According to this position, the politics of singularity defends respect for individual difference against essentialist identities while refusing the power of exclusion or hierarchy. In particular, the politics of singularity unlike the politics of identity "rejects the idea of an essential, stable identity because this is seen as a way of dominating and excluding that which differs from this



'universal' identity" (Newman 2007: 170). The politics of singularity tries to deconstruct the politics of identity based on its difference. It makes possible for nonessentialist difference to be put to practice. It advocates difference against essential identities and the political discourses targeting them. Of course, the following question may arise: today we see that identity struggles are fought all around the world. It is even more striking that the struggles of feminists, sexual identities or blacks have become so prevalent. Should the politics of singularity totally reject such identity struggles? Within this context, the best answer would be that the politics of singularity does not exclude those struggles, however its acts will not be limited with the demands of such endeavours. In other words, the aims of the politics of singularity do not end with the demands of identity politics; indeed, it aims at eventually removing identity by carrying those demands gained by identity politics to their limit. Instead of supporting a certain identity by contradicting it with power, it tries to solve the binary structure of power and identity. Aside from the so called binary structure, it tries to realise a political approach which does not lean upon the essential identities of resistance. It does not include singularity in any identity or essential belonging, since at the bottom line, the politics of singularity asserts that "identity is regarded as a possession and is defended as property" (Hardt and Negri 2009: 329). For this reason, in a sense removing an identity means the removal of property and dominance; in addition to this, reflect the manifestation of plurality of differences and being open to change. Such an expression is a moment of becoming with regards to the politics of singularity. It is a creation process of new becomings and becomings-with; it is a deed of rejecting remaining the way we are. A becoming is a matter of distancing oneself from the dominant categories of a given society, and existing outside what these categories offer. Therefore, Hardt and Negri make the following claim "you have to lose who you are to discover what you can become" (Hardt and Negri 2009: 340). You have to lose who you are.¹

In other respects, we do not dismiss the will to speak on our behalf by rejecting an identity and supporting the idea of losing who we are. On the contrary, the politics of singularity as based on becoming, difference and relationality completely disapproves the politics of representation. It advocates a way of struggle which is not based on representation and which challenges representation, inasmuch as the subjects of the policy of singularity act upon their own will. They express social actors with equally strong freedom and equality. These actors express themselves freely and create common stories without reducing themselves to unity and without giving in to dominance of one. For this reason, they adopt a practice of democracy which is not based on the politics of representation. They are well aware of the fact that representation inhibits the adoption of democracy and as a matter of fact representation turns democracy into an instrument rather than being an instrument of it.

2. A New Way of Doing Politics and Related Problems

It is possible to manifest some *de facto* examples of the politics of singularity in our lives such as the Indignados Movement started in 2011, the Occupy Movement or Reclaim the Streets. These movements include rather remarkable new forms of activity such as developing self-governance practices, criticising representation and insisting on individual voices. They bring about a process that is not formed around any historical imperatives or that does not make reference to any form of subordinated subjectivity. Perhaps the most common and significant characteristic of these movements is that they all try to stop capitalist destruction. They also do not make claims that can be demanded by power while the power is not desired. Particularly, in the Occupy Movements, the strong adoption of the following slogans "Occupy everything! Don't ask for anything!" is evident of the possibility to do politics without demanding anything from power.² If there is one thing that would not

¹ The cause destroying identity: "a becoming is always a matter of becoming something other than what is offered by the dominant conceptual categories of a given society; it is a movement away from the given toward that which a society refuses or is as yet unable to recognize" (May, 2001).

² As Todd May also stated, it was precisely the lack of demands that was part of the genius of Occupy. Because it had a slogan to which almost everyone could relate and because it didn't ask for anything specific it allowed Americans in various walks of life to identify with it (May 2016: 32).



be tolerated by state authority about this new way of politics, it would be facing a group of singularities that do not form an identity and that reject any form of belonging. This group comprises of singularities defining a way of existence deconstructing the numeration system imposed on singularities and which is not included in the current system and which does not aspire to establish a government (Diken 2013: 64). As Giorgio Agamben also argues, such an understanding of community asking for remaining singular prevails in the centre of any coming radical politics:

The novelty of the coming politics is that it will no longer be a struggle for the conquest or control of the State, but a struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity), an insurmountable disjunction between whatever singularity and the State organization (Agamben 2007: 85).

In this dissociation, it is significant that the politics of singularity remains isolated from the organisation of government and has a rather strong position against it. Well, how can it be possible to have such a strong position? How can the politics of singularity develop an effective and consistent way of revolutionary action against the organisation of government? From this point of view, it should be underlined that one significant problem to be solved by revolutionary action is the question of how to establish the horizontal togetherness of movements or how to combine the political movements horizontally. In other words, we come across with the following question: how can the actions bring the search for "singularity in plurality" into effect? It also has become clear that some progress has been made lately in order to strengthen the relationship among different components of the anti-globalisation movement. For instance, it has been obvious that the plural and fragmented appearance of this movement is forced to gain a horizontal and plural togetherness against one common enemy through Social Forums representing cooperation in this regard (Yıldırım 2013: 15). The different social movements within the anti-globalisation movement adopt the habit of establishing an intense communication network through Social Forums in order to come together and focalise their diverse impacts on the system (Yıldırım 2013: 64). New social movements have the opportunity to create their own battlefields and to add these battlefields to other battlefields, therefore to learn new experiences through such forums. Social Forums enable various experiences and perspectives to interact with each other. World Social Forum and the other social forums born from it try to bring groups of socialists, anarchists, environmentalists, feminists, farmers and producers, students, diverse ethnic groups, immigrants and refugees together (Yıldırım 2013: 127). They enable such movements fed by different experiences to establish a sort of relationality, cooperation or coordination network. In this regard, the counter-hegemonic stance that needs to be developed shows that scattered movements under the cover of anti-globalisation can come together and define more than their sum. This counter-hegemonic stance can exhibit an understanding of struggle which can demonstrate both the relationality/proximity and difference of the movements. Likewise Ernesto Laclau says, "anti-globalisation movement has to operate in an entirely new way: it must advocate the creation of equivalential links between deeply heterogeneous social demands while, at the same time, elaborating a common language" (Laclau, 2005: 231). Social Forums try to overcome this challenge of the politics of singularity. However, it would not be correct to say that this challenge has thoroughly been overcome. The style of Social Forums should be strengthened horizontally based on a common project of political articulation through original initiatives. Concerning this topic, we should once more emphasise the following: today ensuring horizontal togetherness between movements is as important as the fights against government or supranational organisations. Unless the method of struggle is not shaped in a way to function bidirectionally, its effectiveness and strength will lessen in time.

Furthermore, another problem to be solved by the politics of singularity is that the movements forming the politics of singularity are unable to sustain the development of alternative living practices. In today's world where the political practice of singularity arises intensely the problem is the lack of practices of life supporting alternative ways of living and social practices based on freedom and equality or actualising sustainability of institutional spheres. Of course when mentioning this problem as a reason we can argue that the dislocating impact of the movements is still at an early stage. However, we should pay attention to what Negri says:



... Anarchist tradition overall focuses on destructive elements rather than constitutive elements. On the contrary, I believe that these two dimensions should be considered and practiced together; since it is necessary to destroy the things that are not or no longer functional or intrinsically or unnaturally unjust. However, we should also adopt the following idea: what should we do in order to stay together; how should we build and recreate together, what should we do to produce and recreate, to promote everyone's power of coming into action, what to do to be happy? (Negri 2013: 10).

The answer to that question is given to a certain extent such as the effort to construct the autonomous administrative institutions/structures. For instance, during the Occupy Movement some new democratic practices were implemented such as establishing a general assembly³ and working commissions, kitchens and media centres, clinics and libraries available to everyone including the hungry, sick or the ones who want to think or who want to do their own publications (Nail 2013). All these endeavours are to create non-representative ways of direct participation rather than recreating dominant ways of representation and the representative subject of private/public property. They create new places of creative resistance and production where a collectively shared will can be established. However, such autonomous self-administrative practices besides building future oriented sustainable forums are in greater need. It has to be pointed out that the above mentioned needs should not be limited to moves that instantly appear and then disappear immediately after a couple of months. It has to be proven that the useful forms of common existence have concrete means. Likewise Hardt and Negri argue:

New institutions are needed to combat corruption, as we have said, not by unifying society and creating conformity to social norms, but by facilitating the production of the beneficial forms of the common, keeping access to it open and equal, and aiding the joyful encounters of singularities that compose the multitude –and at the same time combating all obstacles that stand in its way (Hardt and Negri 2009: 370).

Today, one of the most critical challenges that social movements face is the issue of how to construct sustainability or proliferation in time and place (Hardt, 2015). Beyond the transitional spatial and social limitations of the movements we have to establish new, effective networking forms. In other words, we have to construct new forms of organizing that will expose the invalidity of the existing world order and that would reflect a peaceful process. We should create institutions based on egalitarian collaboration, and we should see that autonomy can only arise as a collective product. Therefore, we need widespread, coordinated social activities. We can help creation of another world based upon a different logic of creation through such social activities.

3. Conclusion: The Sustainability of the Politics of Singularity

The politics of singularity which emerges with new social movements should strive for creating alternative ways of living or its institutions that can be established by a common will besides supporting their sustainability. It should reveal the power of being "us" in today's world in which sociality is gradually eroded and the atmosphere of competitiveness among individuals is sharpened. It should continue fighting for the regeneration of life and the creation of a different social order based on cooperation and equality. Such a struggle comes into existence with autonomous organisations where singular individuals can improve themselves while producing. It is created by a togethernesses that is open to difference, relationality and constant change. The politics of singularity should try to protect its sustainability through such togethernesses. This endeavouring should not be limited to only the mass protests on areas where the capitalist system is dysfunctional; furthermore, we should create a breaking point on the current order by using those protests as a starting point, and a new social order should uncover a constant transformative action in moments of encounters with others and interaction with others. As a result, we should once more emphasise that the

³ In contrast to general assemblies in the traditional sense, general assemblies within the Occupy movement emerged from the coming together of singularities. Examples of the politics of singularity such as the Occupy movement both vitalizes grassroots democracy practices and evolves these practices into some kind of plurivocality.



preliminary subjects that the politics of singularity should touch upon are the consolidation of horizontal/parallel links among movements on a common ground and the sustainability of creative, experimental, collective life experiences. The anti-capitalist areas of solidarity and autonomy should constantly try to be built based on the idea of the recreation of the common. No matter how glorious the moments of protests that bring people together are in Egypt, Tunisia, Spain, Turkey or Brazil, it should be underlined that the things done afterwards, including the creation of new alternative ways of living and the efforts for institutionalising the understanding of the anti-capitalist community, are just as important as the very first moment when the protests occur. The politics of singularity should strive for developing such processes of institutionalising besides the social breaking points led by protests or insurgency and should consolidate a transformation that empowers democratic decision making capacities. It should be able to establish a way of life that is not under the patronage of global capitalism and a brand new system based on the radical democracy of singularities which is a direct, participatory, horizontal and absolute democracy.⁴

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⁴ True democracy should be able to challenge state authority because, as Miguel Abensour points out, the state is a threat for democracy or it tends to destroy democracy; particularly the consensus that is assumed to exist between the state and democracy is unacceptable (Abensour, 2011: 123).